Perrot, Sir James

(1571/2–1637)

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Perrot, Sir James (1571/2–1637), politician, was probably born in Munster, the third (but sole illegitimate) son of Sir John Perrot (1528–1592), lord deputy of Ireland, and his mistress, Sybil Jones of Radnorshire. His father owned the Haroldston estate, near Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire, but James may have spent his boyhood at Westmead in Carmarthenshire, one of Sir John's lesser Welsh properties. On 29 May 1584, shortly before Sir John's departure for Dublin to take up office as Ireland's lord deputy, Perrot was recognized by his father, who granted him full rights of inheritance. Six years later he confirmed these rights by a second conveyance after discovering that the first had been legally flawed.

Early years and inheritance

Perrot matriculated at Jesus College, Oxford, aged fourteen on 8 July 1586 but did not graduate. He received a sound classical education, publishing in 1600 a short treatise on Greek philosophy, *The First Part of the Consideration of Humane Condition*. After leaving university he is said by Anthony Wood to have travelled abroad for a few years. He entered the Middle Temple in January 1591. The following year witnessed the imprisonment, attainder, and death of his father. His family's fortunes were rescued by the queen's favourite, Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, whose sister had married Perrot's sole surviving half-brother, Sir Thomas Perrot. The latter was restored by statute to his patrimony in March 1593, but died without male issue in February 1594, leaving James as heir to the Perrot estates. Despite the conveyances of 1584 and 1590, James's illegitimacy impeded his smooth succession. For the next fifteen years he was locked in a series of legal battles, first with Sir Thomas's widow, who was ultimately bought off with an annuity, and then with his erstwhile ally, Thomas Perrot of London, a descendant of a younger brother of Perrot's paternal grandfather. James ultimately triumphed, but the ordeal caused him to fall back on a deeply held religious faith; about this time he composed a series of prayers to help him through his 'adversities', which he later published (NL Wales, J. Perrot, *An Invitation unto Prayer*, 1624, preface).

In 1596 Perrot wrote a tract aimed at discouraging soldiers and scholars from settling abroad, where they might plot invasion. Entitled *Discovery of Discontented Minds*, it was dedicated to Essex, to whom Perrot continued to look for protection despite his dispute with the earl's sister. In the following year Perrot was returned to parliament for Haverfordwest, but played no recorded part in its activity. Appointed to the Pembrokeshire bench in November 1598, he successfully petitioned to become its chairman in 1601. In January 1599 he sought permission to accompany Essex to Ireland, but the earl evidently declined his offer of service, although he helped Perrot to several stewardships of crown lands in south Wales which had previously been held by Perrot's father. Perrot took no part in Essex's abortive rising, nor does he appear to have sought election to the 1601 parliament. An esquire of the body at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth in April 1603, he was knighted by James I a few months later. About this time he married Mary (*d.* 1639), daughter of Robert Ashfield of Chesham, in Buckinghamshire; they had two daughters, neither of whom reached adulthood. In

March 1604 he was once more returned to parliament for Haverfordwest. On 5 May he made his first recorded speech in the house, 'a long and learned discourse touching matters of religion', which the underclerk described as 'very good' (*JHC*, 1547–1628, 1.199).

Early Jacobean parliaments—and Ireland

In the summer of 1605, while parliament was in recess, Perrot renewed his offer of service in Ireland, where his brother-in-law Sir Arthur Chichester was the new lord deputy. However, he did not take ship, as he was elected mayor of Haverfordwest. During the second and third sessions of parliament Perrot earned a reputation at Westminster for godly protestant zeal; he took almost no recorded part in the union debates of 1607. Following the prorogation of July 1607, he at last travelled to Ireland from where, in June 1608, he conveyed to London Robert, fourth Lord Delvin, who was suspected of treason. On his return to Ireland he was given command of a company of foot; he was subsequently assigned to guard the border town of Newry, where he styled himself ‘governor’, apprehending and killing several rebels, for which he was commended to the English privy council. At the beginning of 1610 he offered to help plant escheated lands in Ulster with protestant settlers, but the reconvening of the English parliament caused him to sell his captaincy and return to Westminster, where he took little interest in the great contract but continued to seek reform of the church.

Following parliament's dissolution Perrot became deputy vice-admiral for Pembrokeshire under William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke, a major landowner in south Wales and leading privy councillor, who shared Perrot's firmly protestant outlook. Early in 1614 Pembroke helped persuade the king to summon a new parliament, arguing that a fresh assembly would remedy James's desperate financial condition if in return the king offered parliament various bills of grace, which had been laid before the Commons in 1610. Once at Westminster, sitting again for Haverfordwest, Perrot initially avoided the contentious issue of impositions, but instead spoke in favour of the grace bills, presumably at Pembroke's behest. However, on 3 June he reacted angrily to the king's threat to dissolve parliament unless the Commons debated supply rather than impositions. Declaring that the royal need for impositions stemmed from James's squandering of £70,000 each year on pensions to courtiers, he warned that if royal overspending was not curbed it would be pointless to vote subsidies. When parliament was dissolved four days later the council summoned him to explain this outburst. Possibly thanks to Pembroke's influence, Perrot was merely detained in London for a week, while several others who had delivered inflammatory speeches were committed to the Tower. Nevertheless, in August 1615 Perrot was struck off the Pembrokeshire bench.

Parliaments and anti-popery, 1621–1625

By 1619 Perrot was engaged in a project to continue the official history of Ireland from 1584, where it then ended, to 1608. He hoped to shed light on the nature of the Irish problem to enable English governments to avoid the pitfalls of their predecessors. Compiled from official records, Perrot's '*The chronicle of Ireland*' was dedicated to Pembroke but, being never entirely completed, went unpublished in its author's lifetime. Re-elected for Haverfordwest in December 1620, Perrot displayed the virulent anti-popery which was his hallmark. He complained that the penal laws were being laxly implemented, and in February and March 1621 he spearheaded the attack on the exchequer official responsible for collecting recusancy fines, Sir Henry Spiller, for enriching himself at the king's expense. However, in seeking to gather incriminating evidence in the records of the exchequer Perrot neglected to obtain the signatures of his fellow committee members to his search warrants, thereby enabling Spiller to complain to the house. Subsequent attempts to have Spiller investigated proved futile. Perrot's hostility to popery resurfaced on the final day of the parliamentary sitting (4 June), when he delivered an impassioned speech on the imperilled state of the Palatinate. He reminded his listeners that at the beginning of the parliament James had

pledged to spend his own life and that of his son in the defence of the Palatinate. Now, when continental protestantism faced extinction, was it therefore not appropriate, he asked, that members of the Commons should follow James's lead by declaring that unless the elector had been restored to his possessions by the time parliament reconvened in November, they 'would be ready to adventure the lives and estates of all that belong unto us, or wherein we have interest, for the maintenance of the cause of God, and of his Majesty's royal issue' (Nicholas, 1.169)? The effect of this speech was electric. Members cheered and waved their hats, a gesture which, as Edward Nicholas recorded, 'had scarce ever been seen in parliament'. After the din subsided the Commons drafted a declaration along the lines proposed by Perrot. This so pleased the king that he had the text translated and sent abroad.

Perrot was among the first to revisit the palatine question when parliament reassembled. On 26 November he argued that war against Spain was affordable despite a slump in the cloth trade, but he may have harmed his case by suggesting that subsidy-payers should not contribute less than they were rated. Two days later Perrot, whose fears for the fate of true religion abroad were exceeded only by his anxiety for the state of protestantism at home, regaled the Commons with lurid tales of the increasing boldness of England's Catholic community. In his eyes the growth in popery stemmed from a lax enforcement of the penal laws and a failure to prevent Catholics from sending their children abroad to be educated. Perrot clearly believed the new-found boldness of the papists to be closely connected to the negotiations for a Spanish bride for Prince Charles. On 3 December he proposed that the house should petition James to abandon the Spanish match, recalling the king's earlier pledge to match his son 'for the glory of God, his church and the realm' (Nicholas, 2.270), which would be broken if the prince married a Catholic. His views were widely shared in the Commons, which accordingly called upon the king to marry his son to a protestant. James was so incensed at this invasion of his prerogative that he reproached the house by letter, whereupon Perrot lamented that the king had been misinformed and that 'our religion is not so safe as we desire it to be'. Five days later the parliament was adjourned, never to reconvene.

Shortly after the parliament broke up Perrot was named to a commission to inquire into the ecclesiastical and temporal affairs of Ireland. Members of this commission may have received their places as punishment for their role in the final stages of the 1621 parliament, but Perrot undoubtedly welcomed the opportunity to help remould Irish institutions and may even have volunteered his services. He arrived in Dublin in April 1622, and in July he and Sir Francis Annesley were assigned counties Cavan and Fermanagh. His task completed, he returned to England at the beginning of 1623, when James rewarded him by restoring him to the Pembrokeshire bench. In 1623–4 he served a second term as mayor of Haverfordwest, ordering the bells rung in October 1623 to celebrate the safe return from Spain of Prince Charles. His mayoralty coincided with the summons of the last Jacobean parliament, and—since mayors could not return themselves—he was technically ineligible for election. However, he evaded parliamentary censure by getting himself elected for Pembrokeshire rather than Haverfordwest, in the process defeating John Wogan of Wiston, who had represented the shire in the previous two parliaments. On taking his seat Perrot reiterated his concern at the lax treatment of recusants and underlined his reputation for puritan fervour: notably he was one of just five members who, on 13 May, were required to alert Archbishop Abbot to the contents of Richard Mountague's recently published *A New Gagg for an Old Goose*, which highlighted the allegedly Catholic elements of Anglicanism. However, he probably astounded many of his colleagues on 27 April, when, during a debate on recusant officeholders, he admitted that his wife of more than twenty years was a papist. Perrot played no noticeable part in the impeachment of Lord Treasurer Middlesex, perhaps because one of his relatives was employed in the latter's service, but he did join the attack on Lord Keeper Williams, who had declared himself opposed to war with Spain.

The parliaments of Charles I

Perrot's antagonism of John Wogan in 1624 returned to haunt him in 1625, for at the general election in that year Wogan, employing a variety of underhand practices, defeated him in a contest for the county seat. A despondent Perrot appealed to the Commons for redress. However, the matter remained unresolved at the August dissolution. When a new parliament was summoned in 1626 Perrot endeavoured to revive his earlier interest at Haverfordwest, but he discovered that the seat was no longer his for the taking. His long-standing local rival, the crypto-Catholic Sir Thomas Canon, who had filled the seat in 1625, was unwilling to make way for Perrot. In mid-January Perrot reported Canon to the government for electoral malpractice, and set out for London apparently confident of victory. However, when parliament assembled in February he was left once again without a seat. In despair Perrot considered a belated resumption of his military career in Ireland, but by mid-April he was once again in the Commons, almost certainly as member for Camelford, replacing the previously elected member who had been found to be incapable of sitting. Perrot undoubtedly owed his seat to Pembroke, who may have hoped that he would participate in the parliamentary assault on the royal favourite, the duke of Buckingham. Perrot, however, was more interested in defending true religion and in reiterating his concern at the writings of Richard Mountague, now a royal chaplain.

Some time in 1626 Perrot published an account of his father's rule in Ireland; he considered returning there but over the summer he was kept busy collecting the forced loan in Pembrokeshire. He returned to Westminster once again in 1628 as member for Haverfordwest. In the chamber he highlighted the threat of popery at home, drawing particular attention to the presence of Irish troops at strategic points along the south coast and of Catholic officers among the companies in Ireland. He played only a modest role in the debates which culminated in the formulation of the petition of right, but he supported the petition and hoped that the king would accord it the force of law. Unlike many in the house he professed not to desire Buckingham's ruin but merely a reduction in his power, an expression of relative moderation which reflected the rapprochement between the favourite and Pembroke which had existed since July 1626. During the 1629 session Perrot accused bishops Richard Mountague and William Laud of holding Arminian opinions, for by now he was convinced of the existence of a high-level conspiracy to subvert the fundamental doctrines of the Anglican church. In his final parliamentary speech (23 February) he warned his colleagues that 'the enemies of our religion are in agitation to break this Parliament' (Notestein and Relf, 236).

Following the dissolution Perrot became embroiled in a lengthy dispute over his vice-admiralty accounts with Sir Thomas Canon. In 1630 he published his *Meditation and Prayers on the Lords' Prayer and Ten Commandments*, which had been circulating in manuscript form for at least two years. He served as mayor of Haverfordwest for the last time in 1633–4, and died at Haroldston on 4 February 1637; he was buried in the chancel of St Mary's, Haverfordwest. In his will, dated 26 January 1637, he bequeathed the bulk of his property to Herbert Perrot of Moreton-on-Lugg in Herefordshire, with whose family he claimed kinship. Following the death of Perrot's widow on 9 May 1639 Herbert's claims were unsuccessfully disputed by Perrot's nephew, John Laugharne of St Bride's, in Pembrokeshire. Perrot's works also included '*A discourse of lawes*', a 58-page unpublished treatise dedicated to Charles I, and a life of Sir Philip Sidney.

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